Flowers on the Window Sill

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Flowers on the Window Sill

by noxelementalist

Summary

In which Rory had excellent taste in men.

[Set during A Year in the Life. See author's note for more information on additional tags]

Notes

This is due entirely to requesting this pairing in a fic challenge for several years running and getting no matches. Apparently, I really am going to have to write the fic I want to read.

Spoilers for seasons 1-3 of Gilmore Girls, as well as for the Gilmore Girls: a Year in the Life (AKA the Gilmore Girls Revival)

Title from Carole King's "Where You Lead" AKA the Gilmore Girls theme song.

Note on tags:
-Rory and Jess do not appear themselves in this, but are referenced and discussed throughout it by the main characters
-With regards to the infidelity tag, due to the setting of this during a Year in the Life, Dean is married during the events of the fic. Little reference is made to this marriage, although there are mentions/call-outs to the various times Dean has cheated on someone in the past. This piece...really doesn't deal with the act/aftermath of infidelity at all, nor approaches the events that occur from that perspective, but I wanted to mark it for those who are particularly sensitive to portrayals of someone cheating since it is cheating.

Scranton has nothing on Star Hollows, Dean quietly admitted to himself as he walked away from Doose's.

It wasn't that Star Hollows was a big place. Back when his family had first moved there Stars Hollows had been a single block of a town, with a diner, grocery store, church, and high school all wrapped around a park with a gazebo in its center. It had felt too small, suffocating for a fifteen year-old from Chicago that was used to taking a metro system to get around. It would have probably remained that small for him if it hadn't been for him meeting a fifteen year-old girl with brown hair, blue eyes, and a library larger than an entire planet inside her mind.

Of course, Stars Hollows had grown out some since then. Sure its downtown Gazebo Block still managed to hold the center of life between the boundaries of Luke's Diner and Stars Hollow High, but there were also a couple blocks of stores now on the small side street that wound past the grocery market for the passersby to try (and the locals to ignore.) It was a street Dean had turned onto after running into Rory- and the fact that all it took was running into Rory for a few seconds to make Dean feel Scranton wasn't good enough for him wasn't something Dean wanted to think too much about.

"Wow," a male voice said suddenly, the nearness of it making Dean raise his head in surprise, his gaze lifting from looking at the street. "Of all the gin joints in all the towns, Dean Forester walks into mine."

Two people quoting Casablanca? Guess it's my lucky day, Dean thought as he looked around until he could see who had spoken.

"You probably don't remember me," the man said. He was dressed in a blue suit with a white shirt and a red tie that barely flapped as he crossed over to Dean. It was an outfit his blonde hair made seem like a try at being a living primary-color wheel, one that made Dean feel like he was looking fifteen years back in time, to a late night school dance that had ended far better than teenage Dean had been expecting.

"Tristan?" Dean asked carefully. "Tristan DuGray? Is that *you*?"

"In the flesh," Tristan said, gesturing at himself.

"Ye-yeah," Dean chuckled. "Wow. You- you look-"

"Like a tool?" Tristan replied. "I know. I just got back from a Chilton alumni fundraiser, and stuffy was kind of the dress-code."

“I swear I wasn’t going to say that. You wear stuffy well,” Dean said absentmindedly.

“Not as well as you wear Farmer’s Market Dad,” Tristan replied easily back. “Time has been good to you Dean Forester.”

Dean felt himself flush a little. He hadn’t exactly been planning on dressing to impress when he’d left his parents’ house, throwing on a worn wool long-coat over his blue t-shirt to go for a walk while his folks were out. “So, Chilton alumni?” he asked quickly. “I thought you didn’t graduate with them though.”

“I was there long enough to count as an alumnus.”

Of course, the rich prep school would redefine alum too, Dean thought to himself.

“But enough about me. Tell me about you. You live here in town or—“

“I, ah, live in Scranton now,” Dean said as he began to walk.

“Oh, Pennsylvania,” Tristan replied, starting to walk with him. “Then what brought you back to Star Hollows?”

“I came to visit my folks for a bit.”

“Seriously?”

“Yeah.”

“Seriously.”

“What, you don’t visit your parents?”

“Not in September.”

“But it’s so beautiful here.”

Tristan snorted, a sound that jarred with Dean’s memories of him. “So’s Scranton, I bet,” he said. “Why’d you really come back?”

“You really want to know?”

“Want to do the normal rounds of talking about the weather and baseball?”

“Not really.”

“Then why not tell me what’s going on with you? Besides,” Tristan asked, “who am I going to tell?”

Dean thought for a moment. “It’s because I really, really hate kitchen tile.”

Tristan blinked. “Oh I got hear this,” he said at last. “What did *kitchen tile* ever do to you?”

Dean sighed.

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One Week earlier

Dean stared at the papers spread out on the desk. In the background he could hear Jenny watching a show off the WB. It was the one about two brothers that hunted the supernatural, the one that apparently had a main lead named Dean and had another that looked eerily a lot like him, only with way more worry lines- probably in keeping with the spooky vibes the show was going for.

Jenny liked it. She said it was an outlet for her when Grady and the kids were getting on her nerves, especially since its late-night airing time meant the kids were always asleep, even when they were cycling the first round of flu (and why William Prescott Elementary didn’t force all their students to get vaccines, Dean never had figured out.) “I don’t want to actually kill our kids Dean,” she’d told him once, “and fantasizing about killing a few demons instead helps prevent me from doing that.”

Dean had tried to get into the show, but it was just too distracting hearing his name being called out by a guy that looked like him at a guy who didn’t, with more emotional pull than Jenny would use when she said his name these days. Not that Dean didn’t know she loved him- she was pregnant with their fourth child, for Pete’s sake, they didn’t have a *frigid* relationship. It just…it wasn’t expressed when she called for him, was all.

The show had been almost as bad at keeping his attention as the papers were. Each one was a new townhouse complex project proposal: one up in Boston, another out in Philadelphia, and one in Scranton. Each one wanted him to orchestrate construction for a six-month delivery window, at minimum costs, while looking like they

were too fancy to be owned by a construction and architect firm owner like him. *Especially* if the firm owner only had his high school diploma and had worked his way up through the ranks to own it, because it meant he wasn't old money. Like the whole world was high school, and him not going to Chilton wasn't going to cut it.

[*"It wasn't like that," Tristan interrupted. "At least, I swear* I *didn't mean* —*"*

*"I was fifteen and from Chicago," Dean said as the two shuffled closer to the sidewalk to let a car pass. "*Everything *about Stars Hollow felt like that."]*

But the worst part was they were all cookie-cutter. Exact same walls, same layouts. It was part of how they expected a six month delivery window, and Dean was forced to admit that it was actually reasonable for once because he'd been making these for so long he knew his workers could do it in their sleep. Not that he'd make them break labor union rules for this.

It was dull. It was seriously dull. It was a paycheck, but—

I hate my job, Dean realized. *Really, really hate it. If this next one asks for minimalist kitchen tiles with off color accents in the fricking living room wall, I'm gonna—*

And when he turned the page on the Boston complex, that's exactly what it asked for.

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"And so I called my folks, and it turns out the timing was right," Dean finished.

"That's sad man," Tristan replied.

"Yeah, it…wasn't been my best hour," Dean said. The two men had continued walking down the sidewalk towards where a new coffee shop had opened up, the *Cosmic Caffeine* sign above its door proudly showing a display of stars surrounding a mug.

"More like your best life even," Tristan said, pushing the door open.

"I dunno. Wife, kids, stable job. I think life's turned out pretty well,"

Dean said, following him. “Hasn’t your life turned out just as well?”

“Hi, yeah, I’ll take a cappuccino to go,” Tristan told the teenaged barista behind the counter. “And my life’s been… well, but interesting, lately.”

It took Dean a second to recognize that Tristan had been speaking to him, long enough for him to realize the barista was also waiting for an answer. “Ah, just regular black coffee, also to go,” he said, before turning to Tristan. “Interesting how?”

“So the highlights,” Tristan replied. “Went to military academy. Finished military academy. Went to the Naval Academy in Annapolis, and then served as an officer for a few years before going civilian as a consultant for military contracts. Now I’ve got a sweet townhouse in Stamford, a pile of paper on my desk, and more time than I know what to do with. Oh,” he continued, sounding to Dean like he was trying to remain casual, “and no wedding ring yet. So far all I’ve managed has been to date, dump, and get dumped by two women and three men.”

“…at the same time?”

Tristan laughed. “No, one after the other.”

“Huh,” Dean said, just then seeing that Tristan had paid for their drinks. *Where’s my head at?* Dean thought to himself.

“Yeah, it’s not how I expected my life would turn out,” Tristan admitted.

“I don’t think anyone’s life turns out the way they imagined it would,” Dean said as the pair shuffled towards the end of the counter to wait for their drinks.

Tristan nodded. “Probably a good thing too.”

“Yeah probably.”

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“What about this Jess dude?”

“Excuse me?”

Tristan rolled his eyes as he leaned back against the bench. He and Dean had grabbed their coffees and gone outside, sitting down onto a wooden bench that had been set up so their backs rested against metal bars instead of the storefront. “I may have been out of town, but I still heard the gossip from Paris,” he said, loosening his tie some as Dean sipped his coffee. “Heard he went after Rory with way more success than I had.”

“Whatever you heard, I’m sure the rumors were greatly exaggerated.”

“You mean he didn’t make a pass at her, break her arm, buy out her picnic basket, and help her cheat on you?”

“Okay, yes,” Dean said slowly. “He did do all that. Thank you for the flashback to my teenage angst.”

“Most welcome.”

“He was a rebel from out of town, who dressed in black, listened to rock and read all the right indie authors *and* Kerouac. He spoke in fast, dropped references, and looked like trouble,” Dean explained. “Obviously he went after Rory. Wouldn’t you?”

“I did go after Rory without that, but…”

“Yes?”

“…he went after you too, didn’t he,” Tristan whispered, raising his cup as if to block the other people on the street from reading his lips.

“Yeah,” Dean admitted haltingly. “How did you—“

“Guys who look like trouble,” Tristan replied carefully, “have this habit of pulling the pigtails of cute people who scream squeaky-clean.”

“Sounds like you’ve experience with that.”

“I do,” Tristan said before taking a sip from his own cup. “Didn’t really work out for me.”

Dean smiled. “Didn’t for me either,” he told Tristan.

Dean didn’t tell Tristan how being with Jess had been. How it felt to sneak out at night, shimmying carefully down the tree branch outside his bedroom window to jump onto the ground below and meet a guy with upswept brown hair and slight stubble who tasted like tabasco

sauce and coffee and pepper waiting there for him. To walk around, Jess swapping stories of life with his mom in New York for stories of Dean's life with his grandmother in Chicago. To find himself pressed against in the dark side-alleys behind Luke's diner and alongside darker cars parked miles away at the edge of town by the Walmart, being kissed within inches of his life.

Then how it felt to go home, pretend to sleep, pretend to wake up, and during the day find himself exhaustedly still in love in Rory, still having to pretend to want to fight Jess for her as he watched her fall as in love with him as Dean was when what Dean really wanted was to date them both. What it was like not being able to say anything because he wasn't— nobody in Stars Hollows viewed him as the Chosen Child the way they did Rory, the aftermath of their first Prom night together alone proved that— and he *obviously* wasn't good enough for Jess to make the heartbreak of leaving Rory to date him worth it. And how it hurt to have to break up with Rory when he couldn't take it anymore, and then break up with Jess when he left for California without saying goodbye or seeing Dean again any of the times he came back to Stars Hollows, which Dean knew about because he'd overhear Patty and Babette talking about it at Doose's.

How it felt- in the middle of all that- to figure out what it said about *him*, the exhausting feeling of having to grapple with something Dean suspected the people back in Boystown, Chicago would've been okay with but that nobody in Stars Hollows seemed to even know about, let alone accept.

How exhausting, and painful, the whole thing was, and how there were days when Dean wondered if he'd really grappled with it at all or if his nights with Jess had gotten lost in the shuffle of Rory, Lindsay, Rory, Jenny. Days when he'd wondered what he'd miss by dropping out of college to be married, if the kind of guy he would've turned out to be would've been one less likely to have cheated on 2 of the 4 women he'd ever been with.

Dean didn't tell Tristan any of this because that wasn't the sort of thing you told someone you last saw saying goodbye to your high-school girlfriend before he could kiss her in a production of Romeo and Juliet, right after you almost fought him for kissing her during rehearsal. Even if he *had* grown up into the kind of guy who could get away with casually wearing formalwear and dating whomever he liked.

Instead, Dean just sipped his coffee.

"Hmm," Tristan hummed thoughtfully as he finished his cappuccino, throwing its now empty cup into a nearby trashcan. "So, where to from here?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, you got any place to go?"

“Not really. You?”

“No,” Tristan said. “Figured I’d check out Stars Hollow a bit. Never did get to see much of it before.”

"You walk through the Gazebo square?”

“If you mean Stars Hollow Town Center, yeah, I did.”

“Then I promise you,” Dean told him. “You've seen it all.”

"Come on, there's *nothing* else to see here?"

“I guess there’s always the lake?"

"…You have a lake tucked in here.”

"It's not Lake Townsend or anything,” Dean replied, “but it's pretty, and has a nice bridge to walk on. It’s about a thirty minute walk up the road from here.”

Tristan smiled. "How do you know about Lake Townsend?" he asked.

Dean shrugged. "You told Rory you went to school in North Carolina, and I once had to build a complex down near Greensboro."

"You saw Oak Ridge then."

"Yeah I did."

"It look good?"

"It was...very brickish?"

"So no then."

"No, not-not really," Dean admitted, watching as Tristan laughed. It was a surprisingly light sound.

"I bet this lake would look a whole lot better.”

"It does to me, though that's not saying much."

"Then what are we waiting for?" Tristan asked him. "Lead on Dean-o."

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"What is it with Rory and men anyway?" Tristan said as they walked along the bridge over the lake.

It had been a bit of hike, but Dean admitted that Tristan's instinct had been correct: Stars Hollow Old Muddy River Lake Park was lovely to walk through. Rory, he remembered, had also liked it, but they'd never actually managed to get out here together when Jess had bought her picnic basket at the annual charity raffle.

Dean had been so angry at the two of them then.

"What do you mean?"

"It doesn't seem strange two you that at least two of her boyfriends are bi?"

"When you put it like that, yes," Dean laughed, "but I mean, look at us."

"A former military man gone civilian with no scars because he went clear to a desk job, and an architect fighting three ugly building construction jobs to support the wife and kids?"

"What, you can't picture the Hallmark buddy comedy movie now?"

"See, younger me would've said that imagination of yours worries me, but now I just think you're being cute."

"No- well, a little, but- I spoke with her earlier today," Dean blurted out. "Rory, I mean."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah, we-we ran into each other outside Doose's," he told Tristan. "She's in town getting ready to write a book about her life."

"Are we going to be in it?"

"I am, at least," Dean told him. "I asked her what she'd say about me."

"…and?"

"And she said she would say that I taught her how it felt to be safe."

Tristan winced. "Ouch."

Dean chuckled. "Yeah, she tried to save it by saying how she almost wishes she'd met me when she was a little older and more mature, but that knowing me then has helped her become who she is now—"

"Except nobody wants to be somebody's *safe* choice, like they're a backup college," Tristan finished.

"Exactly. It almost…"

"….almost what?"

Dean shook his head. "Never mind."

"No, say it," Tristan insisted, gently nudging Dean's shoulder with his own. "What?"

"It almost made me wish I'd done something *really dangerous* right then, you know?" Dean admitted. "Something that would've reminded her that I'm not just, like, a walking teenage heartthrob poster you can throw all your feelings on and get no response."

"I dunno man, you're dressed like one," Tristan told him.

"Excuse me?

"Wool coat, stylish swept hair, a beanie?"

"Excuse me, the heartthrobs aren't this well-dressed."

"They try to be," Tristan replied. "I mean, what are you wearing under that coat of yours?"

"A t-shirt?"

"And?"

"And nothing, I threw a shirt on and walked out," Dean replied. "Why, if I tear that suit off you, am I gonna find you wearing a Superman outfit?"

"Don't need one, my abs are super," Tristan teased.

“I bet. I mean—“

“So you have been checking me out!”

“No!”

“I thought I saw those eyes giving me a once over a couple times back in town.”

“I just happened to notice while we were talking that you look really good in a suit,” Dean said defensively. “Nothing wrong with admiring a well-made suit.”

“Of course,” Tristan replied. “Just as I can admit that I kinda want to look under that coat to see just how hot those broad shoulders of yours are.”

“My wife says they’re built.”

“Your wife is very kind if that’s *all* she’s saying.”

“Oh yeah?” Dean asked, coming to a stop on the bridge. “Why, what would you say if somebody asked you what your husband’s shoulders were like?”

“I’d tell them I don’t share well.”

“You don’t share well.”

“Not since high school,” Tristan said. “Kiss me.”

“…What does that have to do with my shoulders?”

Tristan rolled his eyes. “Dude, I’m telling you to kiss me.”

“Kiss you? Like- are you *making a pass*?”

“Yes, idiot.”

“You want me to kiss you right here?” Dean said, pointing around the bridge. “Kinda public, isn’t it?”

“It is,” Tristan said. “It would be dangerous, and wrong. You’d never be able to tell your wife about kissing *Dristan* any more than you have about Jess. It would be the exact thing that good ol’ Dean Forester, firm owning, Pennsylvanian suburban dad would never be expected to do.”

“So why should I?”

“Because,” Tristan continued, “I’m thinking that the scrappy, awkwardly tall but sorta puppy-sweet, Chicago teen in you that’s felt fine doing an unofficial coffee and park date with me would *love* it, and I *know* the teen in me is enjoying the idea.”

“The teen in me recognizes the teen in you. That’s what you’re going with here.”

“Yes.”

“That’s…more convincing than it should be, if I’m honest,” Dean admitted after a moment.

“So?”

“So what?”

Tristan rolled his eyes. “Don’t make me beg Forester. Decide. Be reckless for the first time in, like, a decade, and kiss me. Who knows? Maybe it’ll turn out to be so awesome we’ll get really daring and kiss *twice.*”

Dean huffed. “Take about an offer you can’t refuse,” he muttered.

“Enjoying a moment shouldn’t have to be.”

The two men grew silent as Tristan watched Dean think.

He’s right, Dean thought. *It would be horrible. It would be a total mid-life crisis thing to do…and I want to so badly.*

“I- okay,” he said at last. Dean was about to ask how they’d start when Tristan took the lead for them both and, with a small step, came close enough to kiss him.

And kissing Tristan felt…weird to Dean. Tristan’s stubble scratched lightly against his cheeks in a way no one had in years- even Jenny didn’t exactly grow facial hair heavy enough for noticeable stubble to be left behind, as far as he knew- and Tristan was a tad less forceful than Dean would’ve thought.

But Tristan was as tall as him, and Tristan had pulled Dean against him lean and comfortably, pressing against Dean’s jacket as if it was a thick blanket and they were in bed on a lazy fall morning and wrapped around each other instead of standing in the middle of a

bridge over the Old Muddy. It felt good, and soft, and for a few brief seconds Dean felt a small part of him that hadn't woken up since Jess left him start waking up, to imagine a life where he wasn't a construction-architect but a college-educated officer's husband who just happened to build a house or two as a side hobby.

It was a different life, and the thought passed distractingly through Dean's mind that it might've, probably *would've* been a much harder life at times than the one he now lived. But a deeper part of Dean— one that hadn't been able to get out much since Jess left— felt alive and roaring, and it didn't-wouldn't be quieted as easily as it once had, and before he knew it Dean could feel himself sliding his tongue into Tristan's mouth, desperate and thirsting. Felt himself moving to press Tristan against the bridge's railing, sliding a hand in between the buttons hidden by the other man's red and finding there the whispy feel of hair and skin that once, years ago, a teenage Dean would've called a treasure trail.

If time stopped here, Dean thought absently, *I'd be happy.*

But time didn't. Eventually Tristan pulled away, and Dean opened his eyes to see the blonde man gazing at him with wrecked lips and gasping breath.

"Wow," Tristan said after a pause. "I-wow."

"Yeah," Dean murmured back.

For a brief moment the two men stood there, gazing at each other. Dean was distantly aware of the leaves falling onto the water around them, scattering red and gold and brown in ripples and waves. Of the cool breeze stirring the stems of Tristan's hair. Of the way the Tristan gazed at Dean's mouth.

"Can-can we do that again?" Dean heard himself whisper.

"I think a kiss like that means we're morally obligated to," Tristan replied back hurriedly.

This time Dean didn't hesitate.

[Later that evening, when Dean had returned to his parent's house and was lying down on the bed he'd slept in as a teenager, Dean would remember what it had been like to sneak around with Rory, with Jess,

with Christy. And he would wish, for a second, that there was some way he could tell his younger self that it was going to be okay, that one day he'd get out of Stars Hollows and have adventures around living the white-picket fence of a so-called good life.

And he would feel his phone buzz, with a text message from an officer who was decidedly *not* a gentleman, to a guy who wished they'd maybe kissed fifteen years earlier, and he'd smile.]

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